



Gender Influence on the Effectiveness and Feasibility of Mindfulness and Meditation Interventions: A Scoping Review

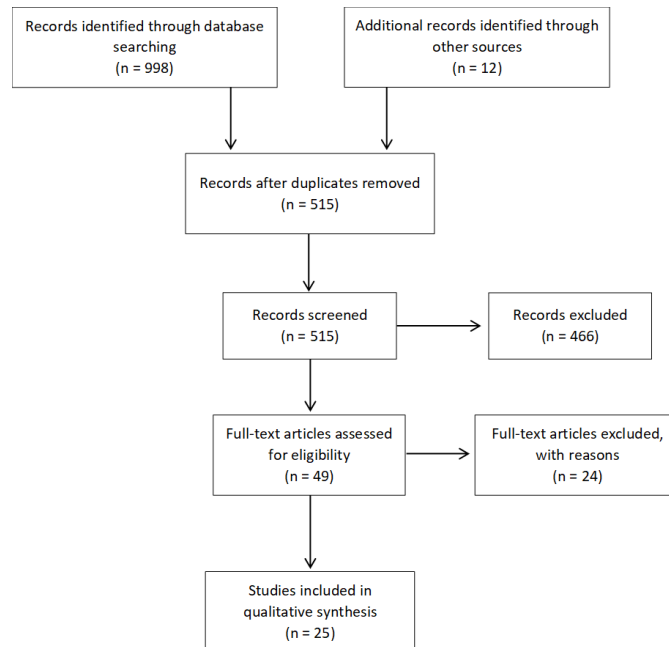
Julia Clark & Margaret Lanthier

Mentors: Nedelina Tchangalova, UMD Libraries, and Robin Puett, PhD, School of Public Health

Abstract

Meditation and mindfulness practices have been growing in popularity as low-cost alternatives or supplements to standard care. We conducted a scoping review of the literature to examine whether impacts of these practices differ by gender. Some research suggests that the effectiveness and acceptability of meditation may differ by gender. However, little is known about how the setting, intervention dose and implementation of these practices may lead to gendered outcomes.

Figure 1. Research literature selection strategy



Methods (Figure 1)

Structured searches were conducted in PubMed, PsycInfo, and Web of Science based on PRISMA guidelines. Eligible studies were included if:

- (1) treatment was specifically and exclusively meditation or mind-body therapy,
- (2) qualitative or quantitative differences between genders or lack of differences were described,
- (3) study population was comprised of greater than 15 adult subjects with at least 20 percent representation from each gender, and
- (4) studies were published between 2000 and 2020 in English peer-reviewed journals.

Results

From a total of 998 citations, 515 abstracts were retrieved and assessed. These were narrowed to 49 full-text articles that were assessed for final eligibility. A total of 25 studies were found that met the selection criteria.

Various meditation interventions were applied to myriad study outcomes. Stress reduction and treatment of mental illness were the most common endpoints assessed in this body of research literature. The majority of studies reviewed were intervention studies.

Fourteen studies reported improved outcomes from mindfulness interventions for female subjects compared with those for males. Research quality, intervention design, and statistical analysis methods varied widely among studies.

Discussion

Current meditation research literature examining gendered differences in outcomes suggests some evidence for greater improvements in outcome measures among women. However these findings could be due to study design issues rather than measured differences. Studies varied in their definition of meditation, often presenting no objective measurement for a meditative state. Research is lacking on the long-term effects of meditation in women versus men. Studies did not explore the contributions of environmental context, like group composition and setting, in creating gendered effects.

Acknowledgements: This work was funded in part by a grant from the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, US NIH: K18: K18AT010207